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PERPETUAL CRISIS

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lauren Paige Buntemeyer entitled "PERPETUAL CRISIS." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture, with a major in Architecture.

Thomas Mark Stanley, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

PERPETUAL CRISIS

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Architecture
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lauren Paige Buntmeyer
August 2018

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ABSTRACT

The speed of the digital age has taken control of culture and identity. This circumstance is allowing society to exponentially develop and dilute identities simultaneously. That is to say, culture and identity are no longer just geographical. As attention shifts away from the physical realm, identities become increasingly difficult to determine. Therefore, physical spaces are lagging behind these new realities. This ambiguity allows other factors to take control of our culture. Because of this, society is more driven by risk, a sense of danger, and fear. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the role that design has in this economy of fear. One question to ask may be, how do the physical spaces help society cope with these sur-realities?

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Circumstance

What a time to be alive. We, collectively, may be witnessing the rise and fall of an empire. In 2017, new realities are forming for the United States. This has been the year of unexpected surprises. In many ways, the U.S. is laughing in the face of danger every day. It is because of this that the circumstance of this project is ignorant strength in the face of inevitable adversity.

Society is currently living in a time where crisis has moved from impending to pervasive. Formerly terror was unanimously understood as 'looming'. That is to say, communities were either, in-between catastrophic events or experiencing them in that moment. In that sense, crisis was always on the horizon, whether one would acknowledge it or not. However, it seems as though, now, the very scenario of crisis has transformed. Presumably it is because of a culmination of several circumstances, but the digital age, specifically, has exposed crisis for all to see. Crisis is, now, all around. It is no longer a matter of eventually as it is now a matter of continually.

Even despite the heightened omnipresent dangers of today, society carries on. The U.S.'s current state is presented catastrophic scenarios every day and nevertheless perseveres. Civilization copes, often knowingly with grim realities, that is, communities are living in denial.

CHAPTER TWO

SCALES OF FEAR

The Nature of Crisis

This document is about understanding fear as it resides today. For this reason, in what ways does design help feed into the hysteria or ignore it? To dissect these claims about perpetual crisis, the following chapters categorizes scales of fear that attempt to look at coping mechanisms for today's anxieties.

To begin, this is a pervasive scenario of constant of dilemma. A current reality where the state of emergency has changed from a state to a condition. This condition manifests itself through the stark contrast of danger against our normative lifestyle. In the setting of perpetual crisis, the routine denies danger and continues without interruption despite the severity of a given context.

The current condition of perpetual crisis marks a stark contrast to the former reality of the catastrophic instance. In the catastrophic instance, society existed in-between impending dangers, if not experiencing danger at that moment. The moment of confrontation in this former reality denoted a cycle for society where one would be recovering from danger and eventually preparing oneself for danger before the start of a new catastrophic instance. Nevertheless, this is no longer true in perpetual crisis, where one is always existing in a condition of emergency and therefore must always be preparing, continuing, and/or recovery simultaneously.

Perpetual Crisis is comparable to climate. It exists as a theory that is at the scale of a landscape. It is a tone for understanding the amounts of information that are presented to society. Where one can choose to either accept or deny the dangers that are presented to them. Understanding perpetual crisis at the scale of nature is meant to suggest a, now, ingrained steady emergency in existence.

As a part of the method for dissecting my theory on perpetual crisis have looked towards media outlets to keep track of current events. A daily collection of media

content has helped frame the temperature of crisis in the U.S. By looking at a variety of news outlets one can gain an understanding of the topics of interests as declared by these outlets and their patrons. This is across a spectrum of opinions, creeds, and affiliations. It is intentionally gauged more on a perceived level of crisis as opposed to a quantified calculation of crisis.

The metric for analyzing this daily news log is divided between the vocabulary chosen by media outlets and the topic reported by the media outlet. (See Fig. 2.1-2.6 located in the appendix.) Language being the compelling means that lures us into trending topics. Media for better or worse has been one way for one to think about crisis in the United States. It is merely the overarching understanding of what one is confronted with on a daily basis and from here, to be more specific, looking towards architecture, object, and self, there continues an array of scales in relation to crisis.

Objects of Denial

Moving from a media landscape to the object. The following is a dissection of Objects of Denial. These are devices which help one avoid the miserable realities that are ubiquitous to society. These items distract individuals from greater forces by helping us cope. They mesmerize, camouflage, and redirect our despair.

Some of these objects have transparent uses to us. That is to say, it can be clear to us how objects ameliorate an existing condition. We can even participate and use objects knowing, ultimately, that their function is only a temporary fix to a larger problem.

In most scenarios objects of denial are often part of a collective. They work best in excess of one another. Singular objects perhaps carry more sentimental value for their individual thingness, but in many cases multiples of one object allow for certifiable deniability by their overwhelming quantity. A surplus of one item is the best insulation to weather reality. The gun collection that is perhaps overkill; the cigarettes or any other equivalent vice; and in the case of the night light, these are devices introduced to us at day-one to sooth the overwhelming nature of our surroundings.

The quality of cuteness that is occasionally displayed in Object of Denial. Cuteness is the nearly inevitable experience of white-knuckling-a-chair at the site of a puppy. (See Fig. 2.7) Cuteness hypnotizes where one often cannot break the spell to rationally assess a given situation. It is the 'awwwww' reaction at first gaze of adorable fluffiness. It is biology tricking us into trusting cuteness because of our ingrained need to protect our young. These are the effects of baby schema. Like many objects of denial, though, even knowing this scenario, as many do and are still willing participants in all things 'cute'.

For this reason, one can view cuteness as coping. The large eyes, the oversized head, and the button nose are qualities of cuteness that mesmerize in a way as to distract from what is really going on.

Architectures of Insecurity

To continue, Architectures of Insecurity can also be more dense and less veneer. Namely, it is important to realize that Architectures of Insecurity are often physically secure. Obvious examples of security in some ways are representations of a highly volatile counter scenario. Highly secure spaces are meant to deflect our personal uncertainties by proving their reliability in a material sense. (See Fig. 2.8) They are an equal and opposite reaction to a psychological emotional insecurity. The higher the emotional danger, the more architecture has to work in order to mitigate these emotions.

At the same time, Architectures of Insecurity are not as easy to identify as spaces of excess. There are also spaces that are vulnerable because of a reliance on perceived safety. Unlike the monster truck with its overt qualities identifying insecurity, some spaces can also feel physically and psychologically safe, but are nevertheless exposed. To put it another way, these spaces which one might assume are secure, are nevertheless expose to threats. These spaces are seemingly insulated from danger, but hyper responsive once danger is introduced. The fragility of these spaces becomes glaring in moments of crisis. The space of the home can therefore be understood as an Architecture of Insecurity.

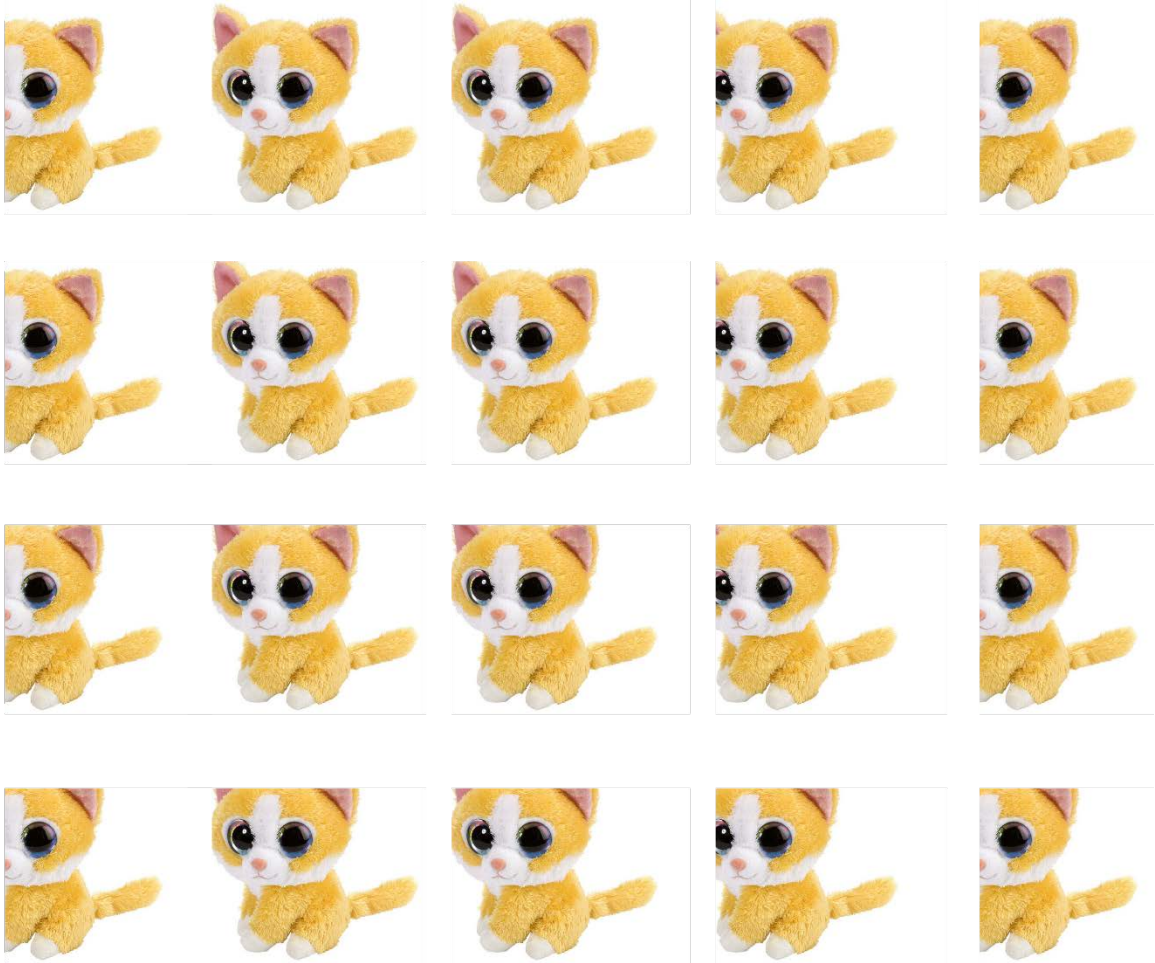


Figure 2.7. 'Cuteness as Coping'

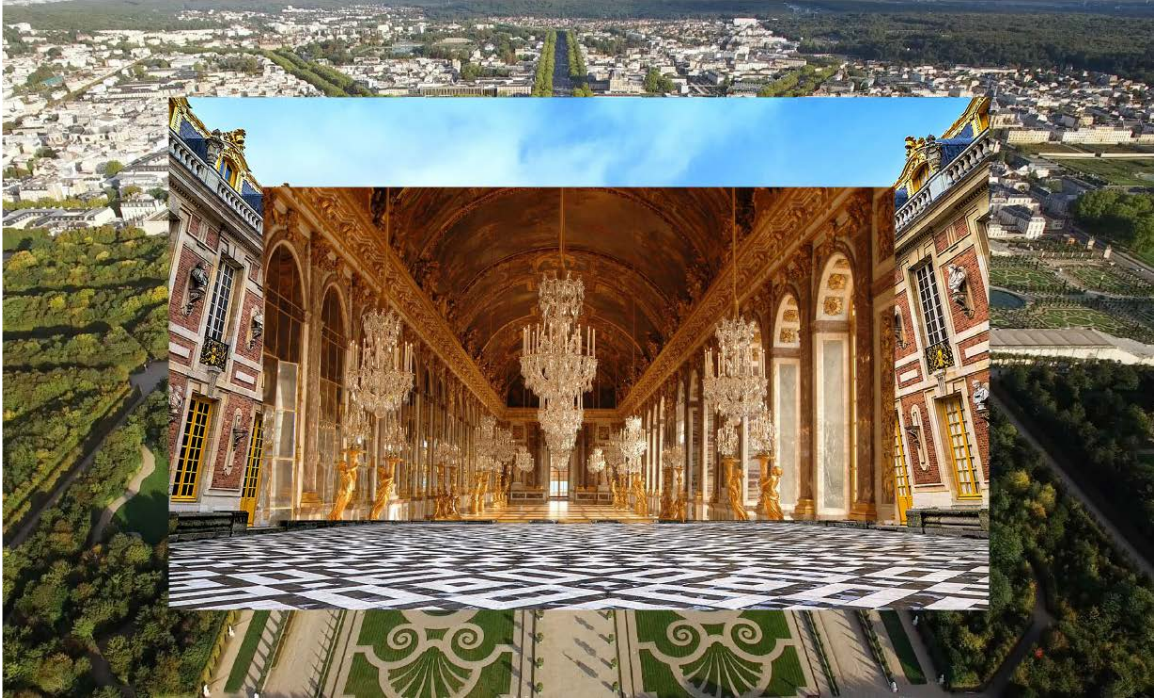


Figure 2.8. Excessive materiality collage of Versailles

For many, the home operates as an asylum, but is nevertheless easily altered upon the introduction of a threat. Despite the assumption of security, one additional component has the ability to disrupt the entire expectation of safety.

Sufficient Psychosis

The third scale of fear, is the scale of our mind or our psychosis. Psychosis is a departure from one reality and arrival to another. It is a perception that manifests in behavioral tendencies. It is an action that show up again and again and again. (Fig. 2.9) The repetition, the series, the action are unrelenting and producing a hyper-awareness of self.

In perpetual crisis, the psychosis becomes heightened. The habits are more intense and they ultimately are the actions which produce the Objects of Denial and Architectures of Insecurity. They are also the obsessions that in turn engage and give purpose to Objects of Denial and Architectures of Insecurity after their creation.

One psychosis that many of us are familiar with is the hoarder. The hoarder is a subset of psychosis who is obsessed with accumulation. They are the ones who



Figure 2.9. 'Compulsiveness'

give all objects purpose while simultaneously strip objects of their intended purpose. They value all and therefore value none. Much like objects of denial the sheer number of items makes them powerful. The more they have physically the less stress they feel emotionally. Physical items that insulate the mind. The less room to move, the less the mind will roam. They are the purveyors of pervasive sentimentality. They are preparing for the 'what-if' scenario, but rather than a concern for perseverance it is rather a concern for nostalgia. They fear most, forgetting or being forgotten.

The prepper is another subset of psychosis. It is not unlike the hoarder, but the prepper acts with more purpose. Rather than collect to connect, as is the case with the hoarder, the prepper, collects to continue. The prepper's concern is for the day in which our reality is their reality. The day in which majority recognizes survival rather dismisses it. The preppers are hoarders, but with a hyper-awareness of entropy. However, with that in mind, the existence of the prepper comes into question in perpetual crisis. If one is always in a state of crisis, then how one can prepare for a scenario in which they are already living?

Psychosis is often attributed to collecting or some other action for coping, but it can also be identified in less tangible scenario or rather personality traits. Coping with comedy as way to deflect reality. Humor make us both laugh and cry, because in it we find truth. It, at once, helps us forget, but reminds us of reality.

Contingents of Uncertain Loss

The final category of fear to consider is Contingents of Uncertain Loss. These are the economies of fear. The preparation and expectation are foundational situations to an economy of fear. We are most familiar with such economies through examples like insurance. Insurance allows us to suspend our worries, but not eradicate them.

We are willingly fooled by circular reasoning. Insurance is not failsafe. It breeds in anticipation. It's always a what-if scenario that seduces us to comply. This is not necessarily a familiar scale like that of the object, architecture, or landscape, but is equally a considerable force and player in understanding our relation to crisis.

The preparation and expectation are foundational situations to an economy of fear. Insurance allows us to suspend our worries, but not eradicate them. We are willingly fooled by circular reasoning. Insurance is not failsafe. It breeds in anticipation. It's always a what-if scenario that seduces us to comply.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concern for these scales of fear is consider where architecture and design are in relation to these ideas. Ultimately, there are larger questions at stake. The architect in its popularly known form may be becoming irrelevant. As society now exists in a new condition of perpetual crisis, architectural discourse is experiencing a crisis of its own.

‘Architectural discourse is always threatened by the city. It is built on fear, an expert fear even.’ (Resisting the City, Wigley) For example, once the city started to digitize, the city grew beyond the scale of the architect’s capability. The usual gambit of the architect no longer sufficed to represent the wants and need of society. The realm of desire shifted away from physical and the role of the architects became less than, if not redundant altogether. In order to compensate for this new reality architects did not admit defeat but continued to stress physical forms, despite that physicality itself was being diluted by the digital age. The formlessness of the city did not sit well with the discourse. The response to this fate has been for architects to continue to fetishize physical space. Architects continue to assert the materiality of the real to cope with reality. Architects create realities in physical space to escape the world. There is comfort in escapism.

Nevertheless, the discourse survives because it is a profession that deals in economies of fear. The physical spaces are not only a reflection of architects fears of relevance, but large cultural and societal fears, as well. The production of order and rationality in physical space brings coherence to an otherwise screwed up world. The trick is the spaces designed by architects are, in part, an image of these fears and therefore architects are a part of defining that fear and how society copes. Not unlike the curation of media topics that dictate the flux of fear in society, architects are doing much of the same thing — it is just at a much slower pace.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Mark Wigley. "Resisting the City." *TransUrbanism*, V2_Publishing/NAi Publishing, 2002.

APPENDIX

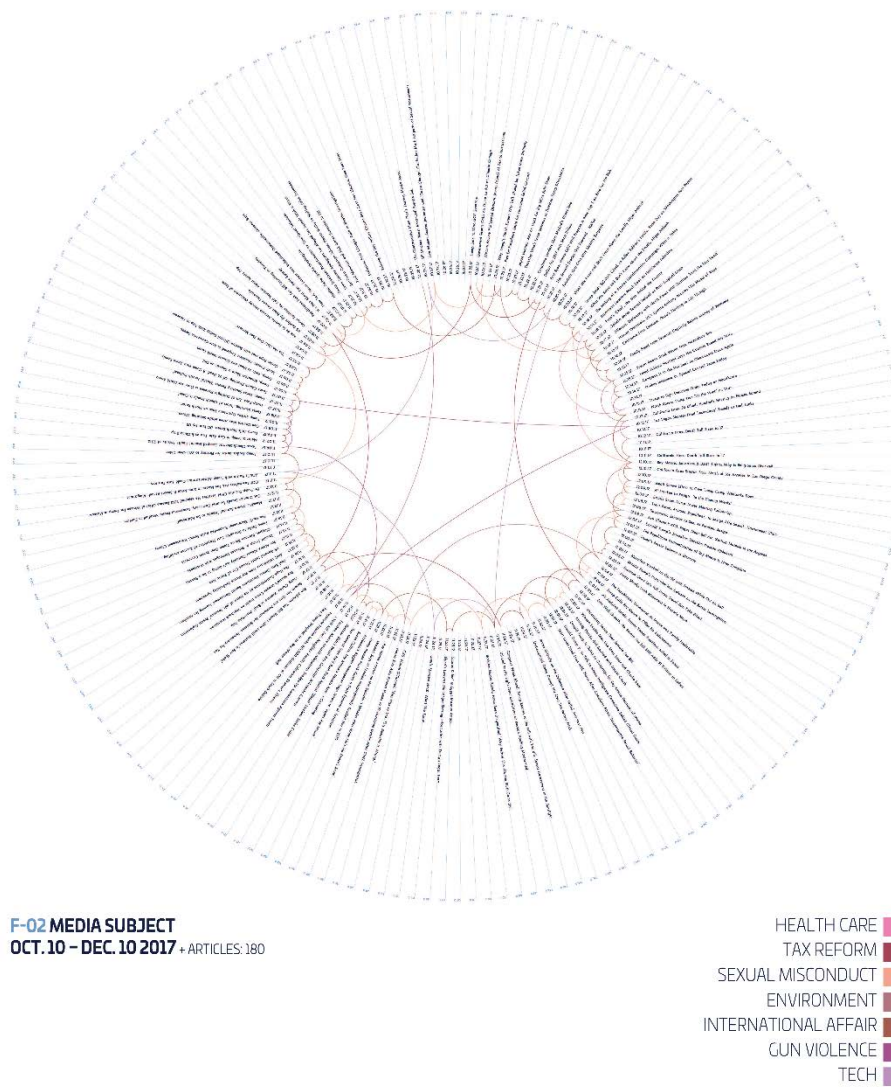


Figure 2.1. AP News Media Subject

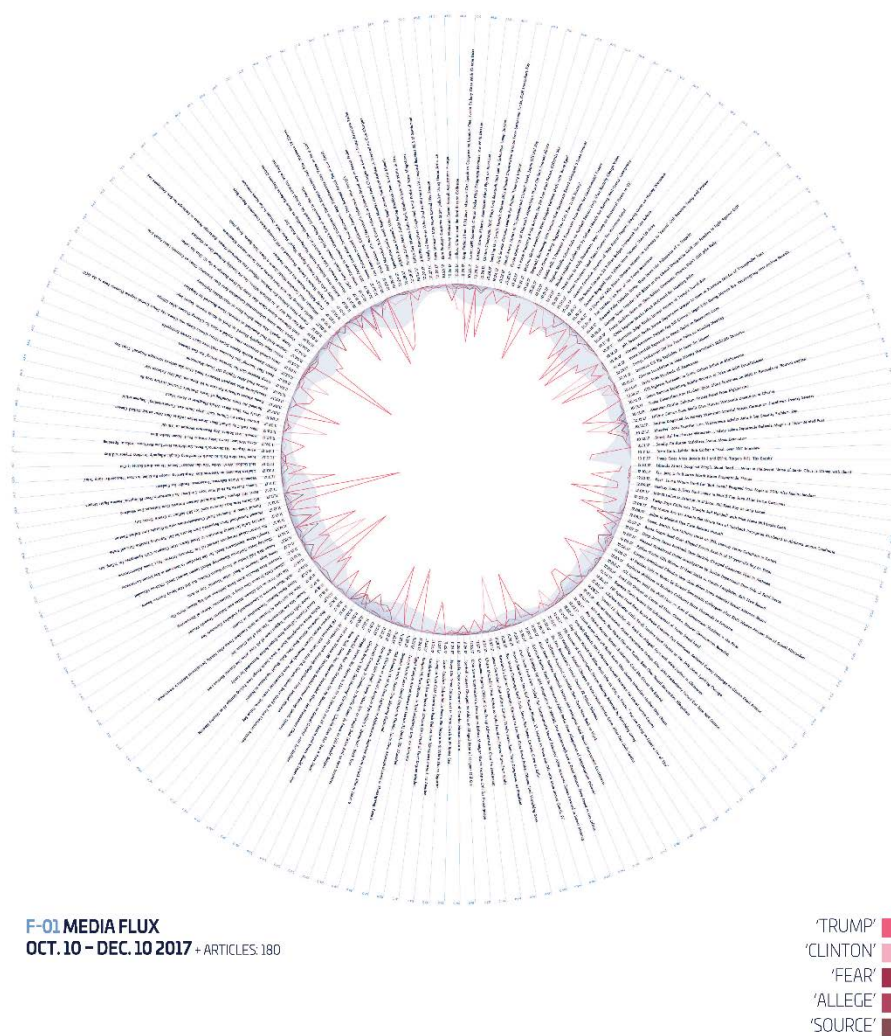


Figure 2.2. AP News Media Vocabulary

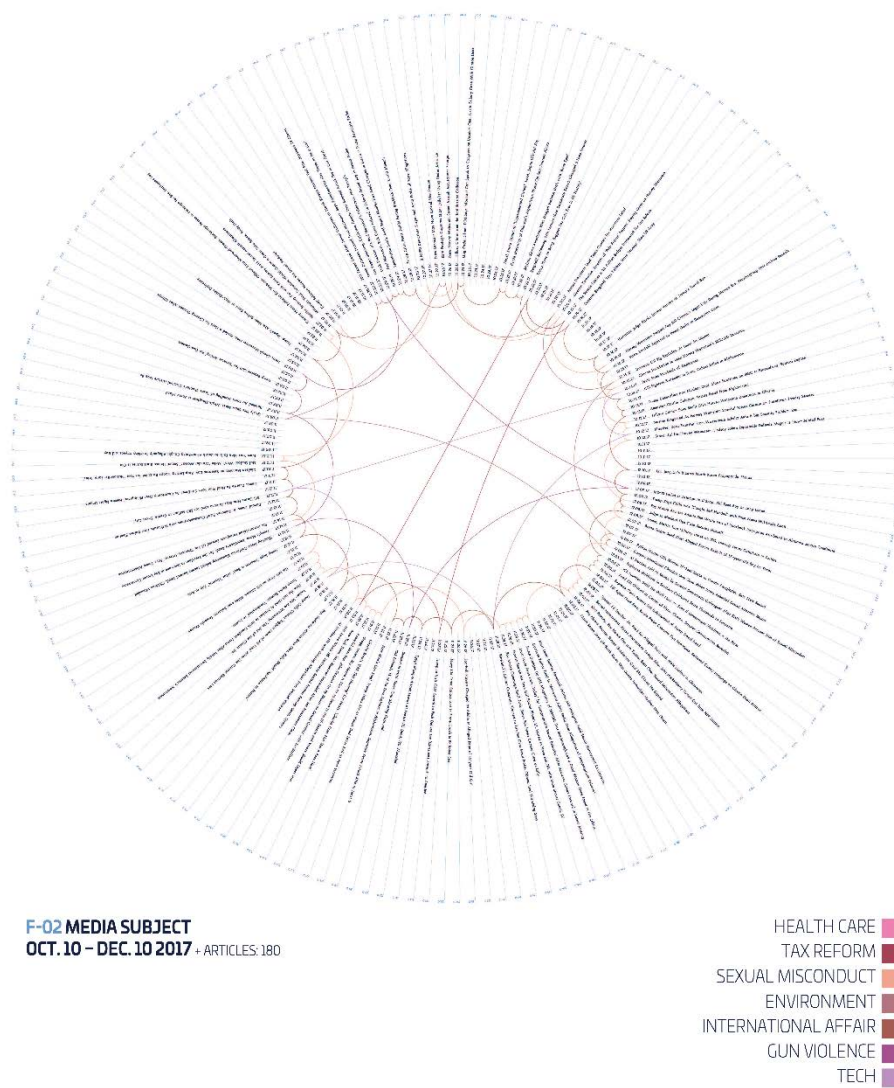
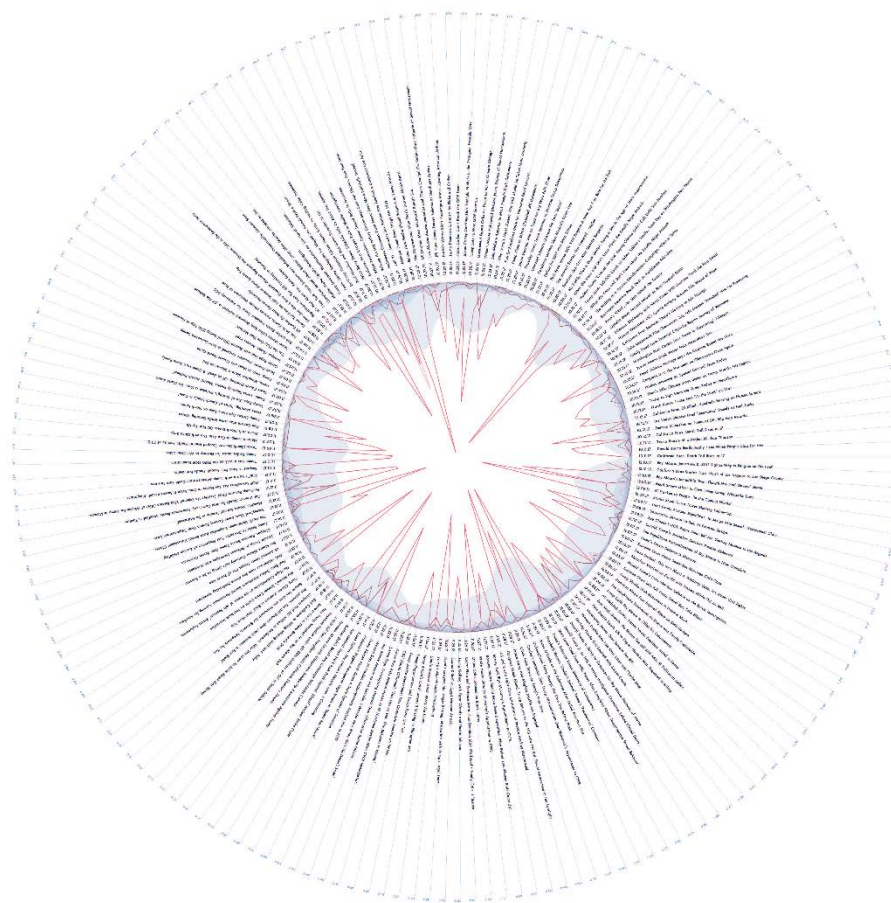


Figure 2.3. CNN Media Subjects



F-01 MEDIA FLUX
OCT. 10 - DEC. 10 2017 + ARTICLES: 180

'TRUMP'
 'CLINTON'
 'FEAR'
 'ALLEGE'
 'SOURCE'

Figure 2.4. CNN Media Vocabulary

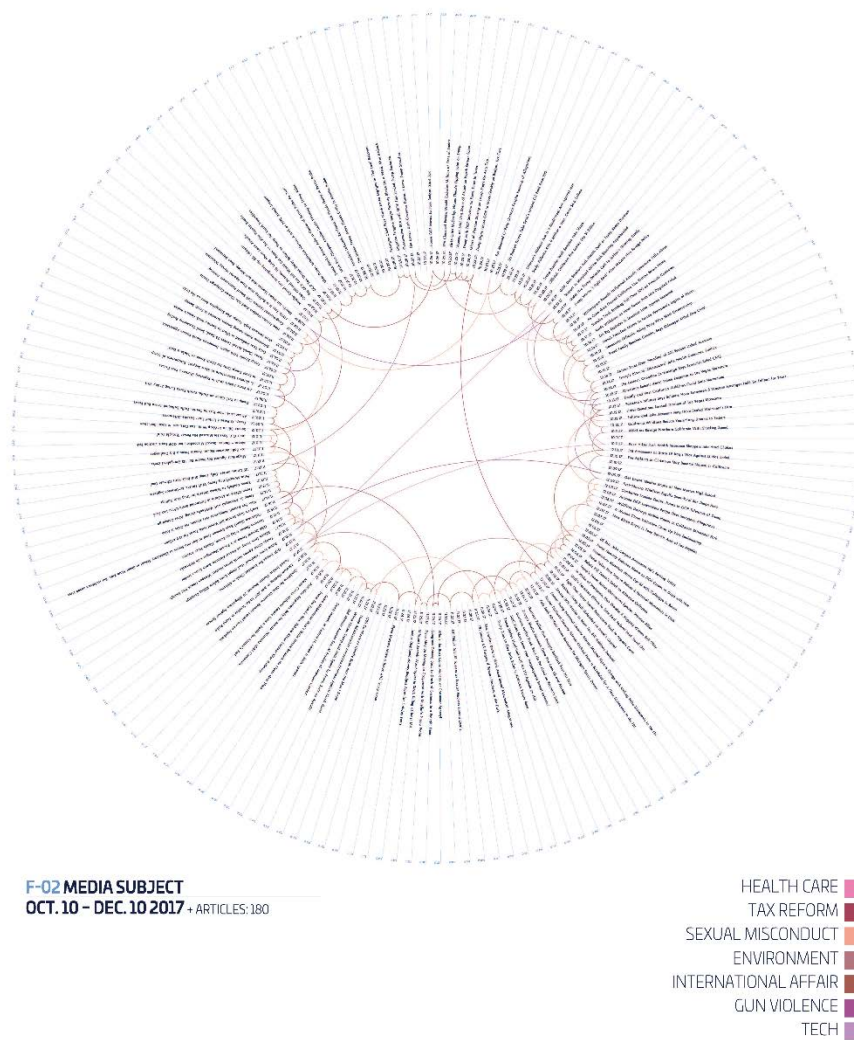


Figure 2.5. Fox Media Subjects

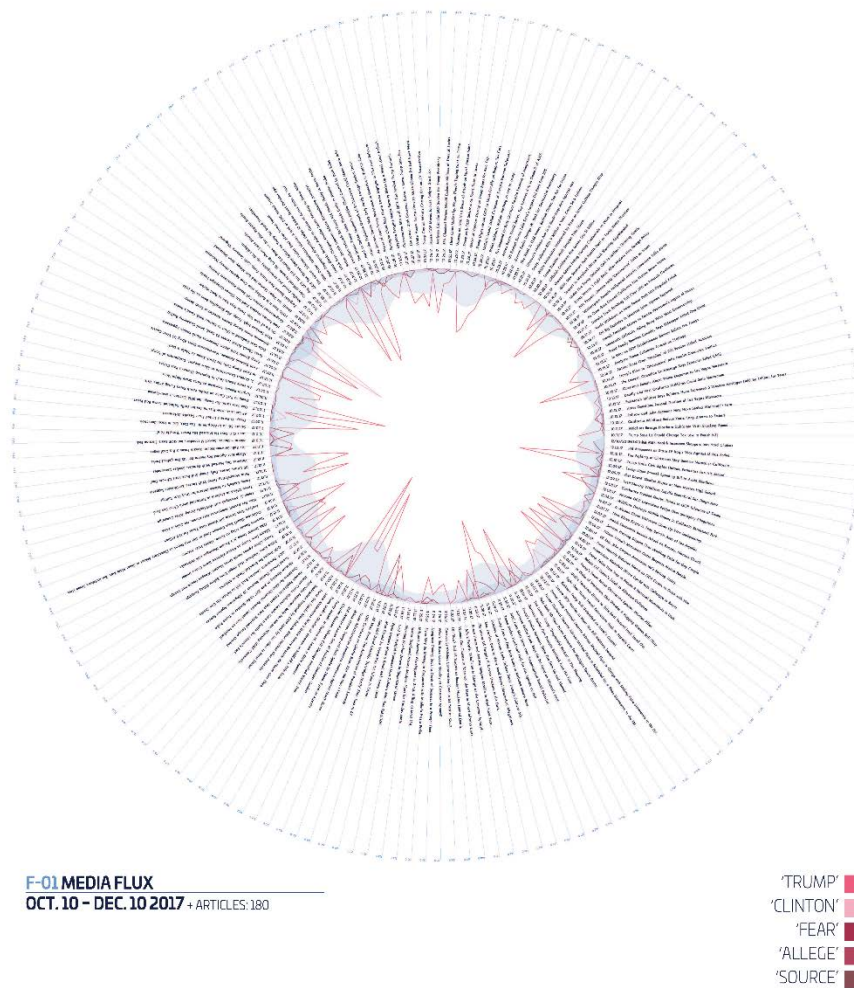


Figure 2.6. Fox Media Vocabulary

VITA

Lauren Paige Buntemeyer was born June 5, 1990. She was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado to Mercedes Melody Provenzano and Mitchel Scott Buntemeyer. She is the youngest of two, having an older brother named Adam Buntemeyer. She is the first in her family to exceed an undergraduate education. She hopes one day to use her Master of Architecture to become a licensed architect in order to continue a life of creativity and calculation.